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## **The Grand Veena Technique: Tutorial (c) KG Vijayakrishnan**

The Tya:gara:ja: composition ‘Sri Raghuvara’ in Bhairavi, Adi Ta:Lam is adapted from Ranga Ramanuja Ayyangar’s Kritimanimalai Part I, second edition 1965, pp412-413.

[ Notational diacritics: As is the usual practice, ‘,’ stands for one matra, ‘;’ for two and an underline stands for reduction of matras by half;

‘//’ marks the beginning and the fifth beat of the a:vartanam and

‘-’ for the second, fourth, sixth and the eighth beat;

‘/’ for the third and seventh beat

‘\*’ before the note indicates an ‘anya’ swara

My own short hand devices for the left hand technique:

1 indicates the first/ pointer finger and 2 the middle finger.

if a plucking has to be executed with 2, it will be indicated as 2pl

if tapping has to be executed with 2, it will be indicated as 2tap

if the string is released by 2, it will be indicated as 2rel

1+2 means the two fingers are kept together

and @ on a note means the string deflected on that note to play a higher note

! indicates a meeTTu (right hand pluck- r.p.)

Other devices will get ‘notated’ as we go along.

About the right hand plucking: It is gentle to bring out the full sweetness of the tone of the veena and improve continuity. Keeping the fingers high above the strings, they are brought down with an even movement on the string (it would be more appropriate to call this technique, ‘stroking the strings’ rather than ‘plucking the strings’. We don’t use ‘thaDai meeTTu’ much.

In a:di tha:Lam, the tha:Lam strings are strummed on alternate beats i.e., first, third, fifth and seventh

The reasons for selecting this song are:

Its brevity (to keep my job to a minimum)

Veena Dhanammal has rendered this song in the 78 rpm set

Ranga Ramanuja Ayyangar's transcription captures all the details preserved for posterity in the maestro's rendering

My rendering shows that the tradition is alive (and not extinct as claimed by some people) though endangered and I am the fourth generation player of this technique.

Veena Dhanam through Ranga Ramanuja Ayyangar and through my mother Shrimati Karpagavalli Gopalakrishnan passed it on to me.

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#### Summary/ Techniques at a glance

t is a note lower than T (t < T)

Tech 1 sasa, ni !1t 2T and lift 2 and move 1 to T and back to t

Tech 2 sani, da pa avaro:haNam 1t- 2T with 2rel

Tech3 ga ma pa da a:ro:haNam 1t – 2T with 2tap

Tech 4 pa, da pa 1t- 2T 2pl: always two frets away

Tech 5 da pa , da 2T 2rel 1t 2T 2tap

Tech 6 pa, da 1t 2T 2tap

Tech 7 da pa different from T 4 only as a matter of timing.

Here, ! coincides with 2T

Tech 8 ni Sa Ri, Ga Ri glide with 1t to T and 2pl on higher note

Tech 9 !sani ri,gari sa ni complex upward glide + T4+ downward glide

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#### Pallavi

Line 1: Sangati 1

1.// \*da ni, da - d a, pa ; ni / da da pa, - pa ma pa da pa ,//

sri ra ghu va ra su gu

pa ma ga ma - , ga ma , / pa , ; - pa, da pa pa \*da,

Na: la ya ra: ma

Pallavi.Phrase 1 !\*da ni, da

1+2 @ \*da (playing \*dani coming down to da

P.P2 !d a, pa ; ni

1+2 on da and pa and deflected on pa to suggest 'ni'

P.P3 !da da

at the time of ! 1 on pa and 2 on da immediately after the plucking 2 is lifted off the string and 1 is moved to da making a distinct 'da' as the finger moves

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### Technique 1

Usually this technique is employed for playing double notes for raagams which naturally allow a lower, contiguous note as part of the ascent /descent of the raagam. So, we can use this technique to play sasa, ni da and mama, ga ri, in a:rabhi, nini , da pa and mama,gari in SuraTTi. This technique may also be used for playing phrases like sanida, , pamaga, in Kalyani where the notes in question are contiguous and the interpretation is that of a shadow note for the second note. So that, the playing sasada in Kalyani can be interpreted as sanida with the second sa a shadow of ni. Logically, therefore, the phrase sasada in Mohan will, generally, not be played like this. Note: Some 'dialects' of Mohanam do have the hint of 'nu' and 'mi' in their styles of singing/playing. So you find some people singing phrases like 'sa (nu)sa (nu)sa ri, sa da, pa and pa (mi)pa (mi)pa da, pa ga, ri with a shadow 'nu' and 'mi' for the repeated sa and pa respectively. In our style of music, we NEVER do this.

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P.P 4 !pa, - !pa ma

1+2 keep 1 on ma and 2 on pa and lift 2 from pa 2 plucking the string as 2 is taken off

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### Tech 2

In the avaro:haNam, if sequences like sa ni or ni da, or pa ma, etc are played with this technique: 1t 2T 2pl

Advantage 1: Economize on the plucking with the right hand.

Avantage 2: Greater clarity of each of the sounds in question

Avantage 3: Increases the speed of the left hand movement

Extra Information: This technique can be employed even for playing ri sa pluck the string with the left hand fingers when you leave from ri

### Tech 3

Converse of Tech 2 is Tech 3. It is used for the a:ro:hanam.

Phrases like gama, ma pa, pa da, etc can be played

By keeping 1 on the first note, plucking with the right hand and bringing down 2 on the second note with some force so that the note is heard distinctly. The same advantages that were cited for the avaro:haNam accrue in the a:ro:hanam . Specially for fast tempo phrases, the need for too many right plucking comes down, clarity improves fourfold and speed of execution increases tremendously.

Caution: However, this technique should be used judiciously as too much of it can make the veena playing sound like 'type writing'!

Extra Information: This technique can be employed for playing sa ri. Right pluck for open string sa, and hit the string with sufficient force coming down on ri to create a distinct note.

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P.P 5 !pa da pa

1 on pa and pluck the string with 2 on a fret twice removed from the fret on which 1 happens to be placed. And do not bring back 2 on pa as the only function of 2 is to pluck the string.

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#### Tech 4

Several important features to be noted.

Feature one: Irrespective of the raagam played, 2 will pluck the string at the fret twice removed from the fret on which 1 is stationed- so the same pa,dapa technique for todi, kalyani, natai etc.

Second feature: No plucking with right hand required for the second pa. This technique features delicate plucking strategies with the left hand to bring down the plucking with the right hand

Third feature: Finally, not bringing 2 to rest on pa is the crucial difference between pa,dapa and pa, da pa pa,

Another important piece of advice

When there is a sequence like sa,risa ni,sani da, ni da pa, da pa it is better to avoid employing Tech 4 for all of them to avoid monotony (and the typing ). One can alternate Tech 4 with deflection on a note to indicate t,Tt

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P.P 6           !pa ma           ga ma - , ga !ma , ! pa , ;  
2 on pa 1 on ma and using Tech 3: remember to pluck with 2 while leaving pa and then 1+2 for executing ga ma, ga – all in one plucking  
The pluckings match the syllables of the text

P.P 7           pa, da pa pa \*da,  
Same as Tech 4 and pa da played as instructed in Tech 3

Line 1: Sangati 2:

2. // “ “ - d a ni   Sa, Ri Sa/ , ni “ - “”// “”-“”/-“”-  
sri   ra           ghu           va ra

P.P 8           !d a ni ! Sa, Ri Sa/ , ni  
1+2           Tech 4

Line 1. Sangati 3

// pa da ni Sa – [Ri , Ga Ri] [Ri Sa, Ri ] Sa ni;/ , pada, ma pa, – “” // “”-“”/””-“”  
sri                                   ra           ghu   va   ra

P. P 9           !pa da ni Sa – [Ri , Ga Ri]

Tech 3: 1 2 1+2   Tech 4

Note: There is only one plucking for the entire phrase.

P. P 10          ![Ri Sa, Ri ] !Sa ni;/ ,

Tech 2           2 1 strike with 2 on Ri gently and  
and with 1 on Sa with a right pluck bring 1 to ni

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#### Tech 5

1 and 2 parted on neighbouring notes and pluck with 2 while leaving the higher note and then execute Tech 4 without any additional right hand plucking. In fact this is a combination of Tech 4 and Tech 5 all executed with one right pluck right at the beginning of the phrase.

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Second line

// ni, Sa , Ri Sa –ni da pa ,/ pa ma,pama ga- ; ri ri sa//

ca na

// ; ni sa – ga ga rig ga / ma pa da pa – ma pa \*da ni  
vi ro: ca na: bha

P.P11                      !Sa , Ri !Sa –ni

1 and touch ri with 2 and bring 1 from sa to ni with a separate right hand

## Tech 6

The upper shadow note can be played either with deflection from the lower note or keeping 1 on the lower note and by bringing down 2 GENTLY on the higher note. The effect, it will be noticed, is distinctly different.

P.P 12                      !da !pa

P.P.13      ! pa ma,pama

2 1 Tech 4: combination of Techs 2 and 4 all executed with one right hand pluck. Note: Remember to pluck with 2 when you leave the higher note (pa in this case).

P.P 14                    ga- ; ri !ri !sa

Note: there is no plucking on ga. And ga is played on ri sharply deflecting it

P.P 15                    !ni sa – !ga ga rig ga / !ma pa

Ni played on lower \*da and gagariga all on ri

P.P 16                      !da pa – ma pa

da pa played as in Tech 2 (consequently though it is transcribed as da, it is in actuality \*da

## Tech 7

The subtle difference between  
pa, da pa and dapa played using Tech 2

For the former: 1 on pa with a right hand pluck and 2 poised above and 2 strikes and plucks da a split second later

For the latter: 2 on da and 1 on pa and right hand pluck for 2 and a split second later 2 leaves da plucking the string as it leaves the string.

P.P. 17                      !dani

1+2 on \*da

## Anupallavi

Line 1: Sangati 1

// pa , \*da ni - , dad a pa / pa , ; - da pa da ma

ta      ra:              na      le:              ni

// pa , \*da ni - , \*da ni , / Sa , ; -Sa , Sa pa

pa   ra:   ku   e:   Ti   ki

Remember to match right hand plucking with the syllables of the text.

Anupallavi.Phrase 1    !pa , !\*da ni - , da

$$1+2$$

A.P.3 (!)da pa !da ma  
Optional plucking for the first dapa

Or one can employ Tech 2.

A.P 4. !pa , !\*da ni - , !\*da ni , / !Sa , ; -!Sa , !Sa pa

Line 1: Sangati 2

pa , \*da ni - , da da ni / Sa , ; -Sa , Sa pa

/Sa, Sa ni - Sa , Ri, Ga Ri /

A.P 5                    !pa \*da !Ri Sa – ni ,

## Tech 8

E.g., pa Ri Sa 1 on !pa move to Sa AND AT THE SAME TIME pluck with 2 on Ri

As already suggested

Played with 1+2

1+2 1+2 Tech 4

// Sa, Ri, Ga Ri - Sa ni da pa / “”-“”//// pa \*da Ri Sa – ni , da ni/ Sa , Sa , Sa ,

1+2   Tech 4   1+2

## Tech 8

1+2

//\*da ni Sa , - ; Ri , / Sa , Ri , -Sa ni Ri Sa

// Sa , Ri, Ga Ri - Sa ; Ri Sa ni/ \*da ni, da – da pa da ma

va                      ka        ra:        da



Tech 3 but separate right hand pluckings 1+2 @\*da glide to Sa  
 C.P 3 !da !ni - , !Sa !Ri , /  
 1+2 @ \*da Tech 3 except that each note has a separate right hand plucking  
 C.P 4 !SaRi Sa,ni  
 Tech 6 glide down with 1  
 C.P 5 ! ni da !d a pa  
 1+2 Tech 4

Line 1: Sangati 2

//; pa, ni da – da ma pa \*da ,/ pa da ni Sa Ri Ga , Ri - Ri , Sa ,//

“”- , Sa Ri , Ga Ri / “ “ – “”

C.P 6 !pa, ni da – da ma  
 1+2 pa to da and to ma  
 or one can play it as pa, da , ni da ma employing Tech 9 i.e., glide up with 1 Tech2 and glide down to ma

C.P 7 !pa !\*da ,  
 Tech 3 but separate right hand pluckings  
 C.P 8 ! pa da ni Sa Ri Ga , Ri - ! Ri , !Sa ,//  
 1 2 @ da 1+2 to Sa and Tech 3 @ Ri Tech 4 with separate right hand pluckings  
 C.P 9 !Sa !Ri , Ga Ri  
 Tech 9 with separate right hand pluckings

Line 2

//; Ga ; - , R Sa , / Sa ni Ri Sa – ni da pa ,  
 ve: ga me: te li si ko:  
 // ; ni , - , da pa , / ; dapa da- ma da pa ; da //  
 tja: gar a: Ja: rci ta

C.P. 10 ! Ga ; - , !Ri !Sa ,  
 Glide from pa 1+2 Tech 4 with separate right hand pluckings  
 C.P 11. !Sa ni !Ri Sa – ni !da !pa ,  
 Tech 9 except a separate right hand plucking at Ri Tech 4  
 C.P 12. !ni , - , !da !pa ,  
 Glide from ma and Tech 4  
 C.P 13. !dapa da- ma  
 Tech 4 Tech 3 glide to ma  
 C.P 14. !da !pa ; da  
 Glide from ma Tech 3  
 Last sangati of pallavi



## Takes of the recording

Pallavi

Line 1: Sangati 1

1.// \*da ni, da - d a, pa ; ni / da da pa, - pa ma pa da pa ,//  
sri ra ghu va ra su gu  
pa ma ga ma - , ga ma , / pa , ; - pa, da pa pa \*da  
Na: la ya ra: ma

Pallavi.Phrase 1 !\*da ni, da

P.P2 !d a, pa ; ni

P.P3 !da da

P.P 4 !pa, - !pa ma

P.P 5 !pa da pa

P.P 6 !pa ma ga ma - , ga !ma , ! pa , ;

P.P 7 pa, da pa pa \*da,

Line 1: Sangati 2:

2. // “ “ - d a ni Sa, Ri Sa/ , ni “ - “”// “”-“”/-“”-

P.P 8 !d a ni ! Sa, Ri Sa/ , ni

Line 1. Sangati 3

// pa da ni Sa – [Ri , Ga Ri] [Ri Sa, Ri ] Sa ni; / , pada, ma pa , – “” // “”-“”/””-“”  
sri ra ghu va ra

P. P 9 !pa da ni Sa – [Ri , Ga Ri]

P. P 10 ![Ri Sa, Ri ] !Sa ni; / ,

Second line

// ni, Sa , Ri Sa –ni da pa ,/ pa ma,pama ga- ; ri ri sa//  
sa ra si ja lo: ca na

// ; ni sa – ga ga rig ga / ma pa da pa – ma pa \*da ni  
vi ro: ca na: bha

P.P11 !Sa , Ri !Sa –ni

P.P 12 !da !pa

P.P.13 ! pa ma,pama

P.P 14 ga- ; ri !ri !sa

P.P 15 !ni sa – !ga ga rig ga / !ma pa

P.P 16 !da pa – ma pa

P.P. 17 !dani

Anupallavi

Line 1: Sangati 1

// pa , \*da ni - , dad a pa / pa , ; - da pa da ma  
ta ra: na le: ni

// pa , \*da ni - , \*da ni , / Sa , ; -Sa , Sa pa  
pa ra: ku e: Ti ki

Anupallavi.Phrase 1 !pa , !\*da ni - , da

A.P.2 !d a pa / pa

A.P.3 (!)da pa !da ma

A.P 4. !pa , !\*da ni - , !\*da ni , / !Sa , ; -!Sa , !Sa pa

Line 1: Sangati 2

// pa \*da Ri Sa – ni , da pa/ pa, ni, - da pa da ma//

pa , \*da ni - , da da ni / Sa , ; -Sa , Sa pa

(for repeating the sangati)

/Sa, Sa ni - Sa , Ri, Ga Ri /

(for proceeding to the next sangati)

A.P 5 !pa \*da !Ri Sa – ni ,

A.P 6 !da pa/ pa, ni, - !da pa !da ma

A.P 7 !pa , !\*da ni - , da !da ni / !Sa , ; -!Sa , !Sa pa

A.P 8 !Sa, !Sa ni - !Sa , !Ri, Ga Ri

Line 1: Sangati 3

// Sa, Ri, Ga Ri - Sa ni da pa / “”-“”//// pa \*da Ri Sa – ni , da ni/ Sa , Sa , Sa ,

A.P 9 // !Sa, Ri, Ga Ri - Sa ni !da pa

A.P 10 !pa \*da !Ri Sa – ni ,

A.P 11 !da ni/ !Sa , !Sa , !Sa ,

Line 2

//\*da ni Sa , - ; Ri , / Sa , Ri , -Sa ni Ri Sa

bi ra: na na nu bro:

// Sa , Ri, Ga Ri - Sa ; Ri Sa ni/ \*da ni, da – da pa da ma

va ka ra: da

A.P 12 !\*da ni !Sa , - ; !Ri , / !Sa , !Ri , -

A.P 13 Sa ni Ri Sa

A.P 14 !Sa , Ri, Ga Ri – Sa , Ri !Sa ni/

AP.15 !\*da ni, da –

A.P 16 !da pa da ma

CharaNam

Line 1: Sangati 1

// ; ma, - , pa \*da, / ni , ; - Sa , Sa , //

a: ga ma mu: la

; \*da ni - , Sa Ri , / SaRi Sa,ni – ni dad a pa

a va ni ja lo: la

CharaNam. Phrase 1 !ma,

C.P 2 !pa !\*da, / !ni , ; - Sa , !Sa ,

C.P 3 !da !ni - , !Sa !Ri , /

C.P 4 !SaRi Sa,ni

C.P 5 !ni da !da pa

Line 1: Sangati 2

//; pa, ni da – da ma pa \*da ,/ pa da ni Sa Ri Ga , Ri - Ri , Sa ,//

“”- , Sa Ri , Ga Ri / “ “ – “”

C.P 6 !pa, ni da – da ma

C.P 7           !pa !\*da ,  
C.P 8           !pa da ni Sa Ri Ga , Ri - ! Ri , !Sa ,//  
C.P 9           !Sa !Ri , Ga Ri

Line 2

//; Ga ; - , R Sa , / Sa ni Ri Sa – ni da pa ,  
ve:   ga me: te   li           si ko:  
  // ; ni , - , da pa , / ; dapa da- ma da pa ; da //  
  tja:   gar a:   Ja:           rci ta

C.P. 10       ! Ga ; - , !Ri !Sa ,  
C.P 11.       !Sa ni !Ri Sa – ni !da !pa ,  
C.P 12.       !ni , - , !da !pa ,  
C.P 13.       !dapa da- ma  
C.P 14.       !da   !pa ; da

Last sangati of pallavi